

Pilot 10 MRS Meeting Notes
November 7, 2006
Alamance County Ag. Extension Bldg.

Counties Present: Alamance, Bladen, Franklin, Guilford, Nash, Mecklenburg

Agenda:

Introductions

Duke – discussed evaluation

Staff Development – assessment training curriculum

Duke – Nicole shared their information regarding:

- Duke's scope of work and the information that they need from the counties for their evaluation
- solicited input for the fact sheets they will be doing
- consent forms – barriers, necessity of?
- Focus Groups

Scope of Work

Their study is not to determine if MRS is working or not but rather *how* it is working. How is MRS serving the children and families of NC? Also looks at what counties need to implement MRS the best way possible. This information will go to the Division and General Assembly.

When they read records last time they couldn't tell what they were reading. Duke needs these counties to help them figure out how they (Duke) can determine what the counties do. Families come into care/services and then there is an outcome. What happens? Duke needs to know that for the report. Also need some information so that counties can look at data more quickly and effectively to improve services on the local level. This is a different kind of partnership – Duke is not the feds, and they are not doing CFSRs. They are not here to say if the job is getting done or not, it is instead to help counties figure out what they need and present this to DSS mgmt and the General Assembly.

Fact Sheets

Want to give counties motivation to do this evaluation and take the time to do the necessary steps to help Duke gather information. The payback for this will hopefully be these fact sheets that counties can use. Nicole handed out a fact sheet that was a starting place for what types of information counties might like to have. Open to other suggestions, and Duke will take them back to their data folks and see how possible the ideas are. Have to figure out what time frame we are looking at. They could create a query in DW so that counties could do their own analysis on a quarterly basis. (Either calendar year or fiscal year.)

Fact Sheet included:

1. Dual track Distribution of Assessments and Case Decisions – Case Flow Overtime.
2. Timeliness of response
3. Frontloading of services
4. Child Safety
5. Other

- If we did calendar year we would have 11 months of contributory factors, if it was fiscal year, there would only be a couple of months. Patrick asked if they could get it monthly as well as by a year. (Duke will ask data folks.)
- Each county will get their own fact sheet, but if they want to they can be compared to other like counties (same level) and the state, but if they are not interested in that, then Duke won't develop them. Thinking they will create a template.
 - Counties would like to see how they compare to other counties of the same level
- Also discussed looking at some administrative data pre and post MRS (not all data but things from 5104). This might be helpful to present to county commissioners and others. Note that when Duke talks about repeat maltreatment they are including "in need of services" whereas the feds do not. Feel that this is more accurate. Feds also look at kids that had a 2nd substantiation within 6 months, but we can look at 6 or 12 months.
 - Were interested in them doing both so we could see how different this is from the feds figures that are calculated differently.
- Responsible Individual List Information - Need to look at from May 2006 forward – what effect did the expunction process have? Were there differences in the assignment to different tracks?
 - Suspect that some substantiations of abuse will drop because people will think of them differently since they will potentially have to defend themselves in court.
 - This would be next fiscal year. Adele said this will be hard to do with county level data because per county the sexual and physical abuse rates are so small for each county.
 - Might be interesting to look at the rate of serious neglect compared to 'regular' neglect.
- Availability of foster care data – any thoughts or requests around foster care or adoption? Prior to now, Duke has not had access to this data, now they do and they know there are contributory factors related to kids coming into care. They can look at these factors.
 - Counties would be interested to see pre and post MRS – number of new children who came into care and when they came into care – during the assessment or during the case management, also how soon they were adjudicated, number of placements that a child has.
- A lot of this has to do with how the counties are coding "moves" and probably the data is not accurate as it could be. Is this data consistent enough that it will do any good to have Duke analyze it??
 - Not really sure. As far as the Feds are concerned, NC is way out there in the category of number of moves. We are talking about this at the Division and a lot of it has to do with what NC versus the feds considers moves, and inconsistency between counties. There will have to be a lot of data clean up, and more information will be coming from the Division at this point.

- Bladen wants some way to indicate on the court date if it is an adjudication or a continuance, because this affects their funding and it is totally out of the DSS control – it is all on the attorneys and the court system.
- Mecklenburg started running queries to see which judges were not signing paperwork on time and then showed them to the judges, when they saw this, the slower judges responded positively.
- Alamance has a form in the court file that has all the dates that they were in court and which judge they saw and what happened so that they see who did (or didn't) do what.

Consent Forms

Duke needs to gauge the level of interest for getting input from families that have been through the MRS process. This would be done by phone interviews, and requires consents, which were a concern last year. Stressed that they cannot contact these families without written consents.

What were the barriers last year to getting consents? Last year it was more complex as there were face to face interviews, phone interviews, and case reads. Hoping this year to have one consent form, and let people know that they may be randomly selected to participate and just have the phone interview. Duke could provide counties with summary information from families that were interviewed in their county.

- Bladen is concerned that the poorest people won't get talked to because particularly in rural counties many of the families don't have phones. Also will the forms that get signed be from the families that were easiest to work with. Will skew it to not as disadvantaged and more cooperative families. Not sure what the answer is, but this is her concern.
 - Adele's suggestion was that they pick one month, and all families that were involved with DSS in that month were given the opportunity to sign. It would be a pain for the supervisor, but for one month they would have to be diligent about making sure that their social workers were asking these families about the consents. The supervisor would know which families were the more resistant and could pursue those cases with workers more to attempt to include them. It may be possible that there are ways to get around the lack of phone and do some face to face, we can pursue this if people are getting the consents.
- Mecklenburg found the consents to be a huge pain last year, workers were put out. They would like to get input, but would be more supportive of a way that did not involve social workers having to get consents.
 - Can't really see another way. Went back to the suggestion of only doing it for one month (last year it was spread out over several months).
- Request that Duke do a fact sheet about the consents for the workers so they understand why they are doing this and a way to present it to the families. Also a sort of script to prompt the workers for good ways to present the consents to families.

- Counties will have to seriously consider if this is worthwhile, because last time it did not work and consents were not provided so Duke could not get a meaningful sample of families.
 - Holly thinks this may help counties determine how deep MRS is really embedded in a county's philosophy. Its one thing to say that "we are implemented in 100 counties" but really, what does that mean? Have we made progress? Concerned that when there are personnel changes do the new people do true family centered service, or do they just call it that - was there real system change? If not, we go back to the old way, or if not all the way back, slide back a little and think it is MRS because we are calling it that, but we are not family centered.
- Decided to go with the one month of consents for all families involved with DSS. Will do this in April because Jan-March will be taken up with federal review stuff.
 - However, if it will be done this late, Duke will have a very short turnaround time to schedule the visits, and write up results. Therefore, consents will have to come in weekly, can't wait until sometime in May and then send them all in at once. One person will be identified from each county as the contact person for these.
 - Duke will send out survey and a script for workers and families.

Other Discussion

- Worker mentioned that it doesn't feel that MRS is worker centered. It is hard to do all the things that the state asks workers to do, and as the worker ends up trying to be family centered, they work too long days, too many cases. Also when you have both investigative and family assessments, she feels that someone gets shortchanged.
 - Guilford made some suggestions that they do, such as taking people off rotation, etc.
 - Also, the state has stressed that the flexibility to deal with these issues is up to the county. They need to ask their workers what will work for them? There are some counties that have come up with effective ways to deal with these issues.
 - Guilford has a group of workers that meets with no supervisors present and talks about issues. The rule is that if someone brings a problem they must bring some potential solutions.
 - We (the state) rarely hear from workers any more. Holly asked that people bring their workers to monthly meetings, because if we do not hear from these folks, we can't advocate for them.
 - Guilford also ended up reorganizing – did not add any more people, just rearranged, they realized that there was no way to do MRS effectively with the way they were organized when they first implemented.
 - Alamance also reorganized 3 times before they found a way that worked. (They, like Guilford, split assessors – investigative or assessors, not both.)
 - However, there are some other counties that have not split it out because they only have enough investigative cases for one person and didn't want to end up in the situation where that one person left

for some reason and no one else knew how to do investigative assessments. So, it is possible to blend assessors to do both types. Flexibility is the key. Even in Guilford and Alamance when they have an unusually high number of investigative assessments, then family assessors will pick up some, or investigative workers will help with family assessments when the situation is reversed, so its not pure and black and white.

- Flexibility is the key.
- Counties feel that it is hard to sustain the family centered approach. In one county, none of the original staff when MRS was implemented are still there. So because of turnover it is a challenge to get new people getting family centered practice. The new folks got a 'watered down' version of family friendly practice.

Focus Groups

Duke did these the first time. Haven't figured the exact makeup of the groups, want to look at WF/CPS interface, implementation of services provided no longer needed, Shared Parenting, Child & Family Teams, practice variation – blended or not. What would be a good timeframe to do these?

- Cannot be in all 10 counties in the same month. Nicole was thinking February and March (with the exception of Mecklenburg and any of the other 10 that may be selected as CSFR counties.)

Were thinking of having a separate focus group for supervisors and SW. Will need to be consistent in how and if we separate the groups. Thoughts on that?

- People liked the idea of breaking out supervisors and line staff.

If they do one county a day, would it be worthwhile to try to get community partner input. Tried this last time, and it didn't work too well. This would mean there would be 3 focus groups in each county. WF and Foster Care will be in with CPS workers and supervisors.

A good focus group is 8-10 people. So in larger counties like Mecklenburg and Guilford that is not representative, so may need to do larger groups, or multiple groups in those counties.

Assessment Training

The Division is working on the new curriculum for the assessment training piece, Crystalle wanted to solicit input on a couple of aspects of this curriculum.

Previously there were 2 trainings, one for investigative assessments and one for family assessments. Have decided that there needs to be one training and train them together.

Switching tracks – how are these counties making these decisions?

Need to find out about switching tracks, what are red flags that come up, what makes you decide to switch tracks?

- Guilford – sometimes there are small visual cues that the child may be checking in with the parents before answering. Will staff the case and

determine if that alone rises to the level of needing to switch tracks. Sometimes it does not, often they may decide that they need to interview the child alone, and parents may give permission to do that. If they switch tracks they use a 3 level decision.

- Countywide they only switch maybe 5 times a month. However if they file a petition they switch to investigative. They feel that if they have to take a family to court, that is such as issue that it needs to be investigative.

Workers feel that it is important to make sure it is clear in training that you can interview a child alone even if it is a family assessment. You may need to tell them that you would like to do it with their permission (although we have the right to do it if we feel a need), or there may be circumstances that allow you to do this anyway, but just because you interviewed a child alone is not reason in and of itself to switch.

- Mecklenburg rarely switches but if they do they look at cooperation and seriousness of allegations.
- Alamance – pretty much the same reasons when they do switch.

Has anyone ever switched down from investigative to family?

- Yes, if the allegations were simply not there. You may go out on a sex abuse case and it is clearly not sex abuse, but there are other issues, you can bump it down. Need to show that you can keep the child safer better by switching tracks. If you can get better cooperation and motivation from the family by working the case as a family assessment track, that is reason enough to change tracks if allowable by policy.

Cultural issues

Any feedback or suggestion of how this should be addressed? The training won't teach specific cultures because there are so many different ones throughout the state. Will instead stress that if you are following the principles then you will be culturally respectful. Would like to give good, solid, scenarios, for training.

- Requested more information about the Hispanic culture. For example, in the Hispanic culture, traditionally the man is the head of the household and you should speak to him first. If he dominates the conversation this does not necessarily mean that she is scared of him.
- Mecklenburg is working with Mi Casa Su Casa FRC. Used to be a very adversarial relationship with the FRC and the DSS, but DSS made an effort to work with them, even advocating with county commissioners for funding for the FRC.
- Need to remember that not all Hispanics are the same culture. Just because they speak Spanish does not mean that they are the same. Need to be aware and respect this.

Crystalle would also like to know about DV, SA, and MH cases so that they can include some scenarios on these. Several counties agreed to follow up with her.

Next Meeting

February 2nd 10-1, will be here again.